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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAMAKO 000463

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TUAREG REBELS OVERRUN GARRISON IN ABEIBARA

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) Tuareg rebels apparently belonging to the Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) attacked and overran the Malian army base in Abeibara on May 21. The attack began before dawn and lasted for several hours. Following the attack, someone using a known ADC email address posted a claim of responsibility to a popular Kidal Tuareg website. The statement said the ADC killed more than 30 Malian soldiers and captured another 47. Several Malian officers appear to have been either killed or taken prisoner. The ADC said that it had suffered only one killed and three wounded. We have not yet been able to confirm any of these numbers with the Malian military as communications with the Abeibara garrison have been cut.

2.(C) Although details are still scarce, this attack appears to be much larger than any previous incidents. If preliminary information proves correct, an attack of this magnitude is likely to have a profound impact on peace negotiations with the Malian government. Last week President Amadou Toumani Toure delivered a series of speeches that touched on northern security and were closely covered by the Malian TV and print media. During each statement, President Toure reiterated his commitment to a peaceful solution for the Tuareg crisis but warned that he was prepared for war if Tuareg rebels forced it upon him.

3.(C) Foreign Minister Moctar Ouane returned from Algiers only days ago with the welcome announcement that Algeria had agreed to resume its mediation efforts. The ADC attack in Abeibara could signal an attempt to torpedo this agreement, or it could represent a last ditch attempt by the ADC to increase its bargaining power in advance of renewed cease-fire talks. We will provide more information septel.
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